United Nations

Press Release

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General tells correspondents of possibility for Security Council to decide to set up United Nations operation in northern Iraq.

- Secretary-General holds talks with United States President in Washington.

- United Nations report calls damage inflicted by Iraqi forces on Kuwait's infrastructure during occupation "incalculable"; oil industry most affected sector.

- Secretary-General appeals for emergency assistance to some 30 million Africans whose suffering has been overshadowed by events in Persian Gulf and in other regions.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar today commented on the proposal to send a United Nations police force to northern Iraq to protect the Kurdish population. Upon arriving at Headquarters from Washington, he said in reply to questions by correspondents that there could not be a police presence in Iraq without the consent of the Iraqi authorities, who had rejected the idea. However, he said, there existed a "possibility for the Security Council to decide to set up an operation in the northern Iraq".

Mr. Perez de Cuellar urged patience, adding that everyone was interested in moving as fast as possible.

Asked if the United Nations could ensure the safety of the Kurds without a police force, the Secretary-General said that depended on the Kurds themselves. The real problem was that the Kurds were expected to return to their homes, he said.

Touching on the topic of the disaster in Bangladesh, the Secretary-General said the international community's response had been "a

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little slow" and that he was concerned about the situation. Apart from Saudi Arabia, other countries that had promised help had not delivered so far, he said.

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The Secretary-General met yesterday with United States President George Bush, Secretary of State James Baker and National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft in the Oval Office of the White House. In the course of the discussions, the Secretary-General indicated that he had received word from Under-Secretary-General Marrack Goulding in Baghdad that Iraq had given "a very clear rejection" of the idea of a United Nations police presence on Iraqi soil.

The Secretary-General and his senior aides then met in the Cabinet Room with President Bush and a number of senior administration officials, including the Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations, Thomas Pickering, and Assistant Secretary of State John Bolton. The discussions covered a broad range of international issues -- the situation in the Persian Gulf area, including humanitarian matters and the implementation of Security Council resolution 687 (1991), El Salvador, Western Sahara, the Middle East, Lebanon, Cyprus, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. President Bush raised the matter of human rights in Cuba. There was also detailed discussion of United Nations finances.

On the subject of the proposed United Nations police force in northern Iraq, the Secretary-General informed the President that in his view, any United Nations security presence in Iraq would require specific authorization by the Security Council.

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The Secretary-General has submitted to the Security Council a report by the United Nations mission sent to Kuwait to assess the damage inflicted on the country by Iraqi forces during seven months of occupation.

The mission, which was headed by former Under-Secretary-General Abdulrahim A. Farah, visited Kuwait from 16 March to 4 April.

The report calls the the damage inflicted on the Kuwaiti economy "incalculable" with the oil industry in shambles and other vital sectors of the infrastructure systematically sabotaged and plundered. According to the report, the population of Kuwait was struggling to recover from the consequences of its occupation by Iraq, which had left no part of the population or economy untouched.

The report states that the most visible and most significant of the sectors affected by the occupation was the oil industry. The unprecedented catastrophe of hundreds of burning and gushing oil wells, and the consequent pollution of the environment, overshadowed the damage on the rest of the industry. The estimated daily loss to Kuwait was between $40 million and as

much as $120 million. It was only by the capping of the oil wells that it would be possible to bring the industry back into operation, the report adds.

The report concludes that the most lasting environmental problem facing Kuwait would be that of mines and other unexploded ordnance. The danger posed to life would continue for a long time to come, it states.

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The Secretary-General has appealed to the international community for support for humanitarian and relief operations in Africa in order quickly to alleviate the suffering and to avert an impending tragedy.

In a press communiqué today, he expressed deep concerned about the magnitude of emergency assistance requirements of African countries affected by drought and civil war, and the as yet inadequate response of the international community to those needs. He said the emergency situation had been overshadowed by the consequences the situation between Iraq and Kuwait and events in other regions. Additional resources were urgently needed to avoid a repetition of the tragic events of the famine that had swept parts of Africa in the mid-1980s, when many lives were unnecessarily lost before relief could be mobilized.

According to the communiqué, this year some 30 million Africans would require emergency relief in the form of food aid, medicine, shelter, clean water and supplementary food for children. While the areas of greatest concern were the Horn of Africa, the Sudan, southern Africa and Liberia, pockets of need existed throughout the continent.

The crisis has also given rise to massive flows of refugees who were among the most vulnerable victims of the upheavals in Africa today. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) would, more than ever before, rely upon the traditional solidarity and generous support of the international community. According to current projections, the resources available in 1991 for UNHCR general programmes for Africa would definitely be insufficient, the communique states.

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